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MODIFIED U-2 SPY PLANE PART OF MISSION

NASA'S ER-2 flies over Russia

KIRUNA, SWEDEN: NASA's high-flying ER-2, a modified design of Lockheed's U-2 aircraft, completed its first science flight through Russian airspace this week in support of the largest international ozone field experiment to date over the Arctic.

The six-hour flight that passed southwest of Moscow Jan. 27 was closely coordinated with Russian observers. The single-seat aircraft, based at NASA Dryden's Flight Research Center, Edwards, Calif., carried instruments to collect data for NASA's SAGE III Ozone Loss and Validation Experiment (SOLVE). SOLVE is managed by the Upper Atmosphere Research Program of NASA's Office of Earth Science.

Scientists are hoping the ER-2's stratospheric measurements will help them better understand the complicated chemistry involved with ozone loss. NASA is working with the European Commission-sponsored Third European Stratospheric Experiment on Ozone (THESEO) 2000. Research teams include scientists from NASA, Europe, Russian, Japan and Canada.

Another NASA flying laboratory, NASA Dryden's DC-8, also flew through Russian airspace in conjunction with the ER-2. The DC-8 flew its first mission over Russia's Franz Josef Land during SOLVE's first phase last December.

The NASA planes and the field experiments are based north of the Arctic Circle in Kiruna, Sweden. A large hangar built especially for research, "Arena Arctica," houses the instrumented aircraft and the scientists.

Scientists have observed unusually low levels of ozone over the Arctic during recent winters, raising concerns that ozone depletion there could become more widespread as in the Antarctic ozone hole. Scientists also hope to forecast when the Arctic ozone may return to normal

The third phase of the SOLVE field campaign ends in March.

For more information on SOLVE, check the Internet at: http://cloud1.arc.nasa.gov/solve/index.html

For THESEO 2000, see: http://www.ozone-sec.ch.cam.ac.uk.